

Preaching Resources

CRS HOMILY HELPS—POPE FRANCIS' GLOBAL MIGRATION CAMPAIGN

November 19, 2017

[MT 25:14-30](#)

The Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's Gospel account Jesus tells the parable of the Talents. The overall message is strikingly clear. All of us have talents, skills and capabilities and they all come as a free gift from God. There are no self-made women or men, we are God made, endowed by him with unique talents that we are expected to use and share. Now it is very fair to observe and wonder at the fact that the talents that we have are unequal. Just like in the parable that we have heard, some have greater talents while others have lesser talents. But that is not the point. In fact, it would make for a pretty boring world if we all had the intelligence of Einstein, the athleticism of Usain Bolt, the love of St. Theresa and movie star good looks. The point is, that we all have specific skills that God has granted us and he expects us to use them, and use them for good. If we selfishly cling to the talents we have, we end up losing them and more!

Jesus wants us to not only use our talents but to actually take risks with them. Today, there seem to be deep divisions within our own nation, culture, and even families. It can be difficult to stand for what the Gospel demands; it can mean scorn, derision, and even rejection. Yet that is exactly the risk Jesus asks of us; to put our talents to work for the good of all – for the entire human race. One particular area where Pope Francis has called for Catholics to be more engaged is in the welcoming of migrants and refugees. He has literally asked that we each “Share the Journey” with them as they seek safety and a dignified life. Throughout Greece, Turkey, Lebanon and other countries refugees are simply trying to find a safe haven from war and persecution. We cannot claim to be followers of Christ and at the same time look away from their suffering.

We can pray for these displaced people who except for war and hatred are so very much like us. We can learn the truth about migrants and refugees and recognize that they, like us are children of God. We can advocate at all levels

of government for the acceptance of properly vetted migrants and refugees; giving them new hope for a decent life. We can give in support of the work of Catholic Relief Services; the international humanitarian agency of the American Catholic Church as they provide needed food, sanitation, shelter and aid to millions exiled from their homelands. In doing these simple things praying, learning, advocating and giving we put our talents at work for good.

As we will hear next week, when Judgment Day arrives, our judgment will not be about how many souls we have saved or the awful sins we have committed it will be about how we participated in God's will. How we used the gifts God has given us to bring food, clothing, comfort to each other; especially those who are unjustly displaced from their homes. It is about how we use those gifts to become Jesus for others and see Jesus in everyone. To do that, we have to forget about what others may think or whether we can do it right, we have to be vulnerable. We have to realize that by making ourselves the servants of all, we participate in God's will and fully utilize our talents. That is a risk worth taking.

NOVEMBER 26, 2017

MT 25:31-46

The First Sunday of Advent

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus tell his disciples and us something both simple and profound; that our salvation is intrinsically and irrevocably linked to our response to human need. It is not the number of Masses attended, rosaries prayed, confessions made or times we have forgiven others that will determine our salvation - although all of those things are incredibly helpful to our journey. Rather it is our basic response to those in need that will ultimately determine our eternal home. It is interesting that for our greatest test, the one that will come at the end of our lives, God has provided not only the question that we will be asked, but the answer as well. We should take heed!

We should carefully note that Jesus does not put any limitations on the help we have to provide; Jesus doesn't say just help Catholics, Christians, Americans, those who have tried 'hard enough,' or those with whom we agree. Jesus simply demands that we help all in need, it is just that simple and it can be just that hard!

Today many people throughout the world find it impossible to remain in the land of their birth. The lack of opportunity, education, resources and the basic necessities of life often drives them to seek a better life for their children and themselves far away from their native land; just as it did for many of our forbearers. Some voluntarily leave while others are forced to depart. Here at the end of 2017, there are 65 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. If we avert our eyes, we deny their humanity, their need and our chance at salvation.

How are we to find these people who are in such desperate need and reach out to them? What should we do? How can we really offer meaningful help? These are good questions and we should be asking them. The Bishops of the USCCB fully recognize our obligation to help those in need in our communities, in our country, and around the world. As a result, they have created Church structures help us make a proper response to Jesus' demand. St. Vincent de Paul aids those in our local communities and Catholic Charities aids those here in the United States. The way the American Catholic Church reaches out beyond our borders is through Catholic Relief Services. As the International Humanitarian Agency of the Church in the United States, CRS actively serves as *my hands and your hands* providing food, drink, welcome, clothing and comfort to the international refugees fleeing war and persecution and the migrants who are escaping economic destitution, violence and hopelessness.

There are many ways each of us can vibrantly live out the demand of today's Gospel even as we know we cannot do it all. We know that we cannot do everything every day; *but every day we must do something*. We can offer our prayers for those who suffer so much and so unjustly and we can act. Matthew 25 is a clear call to move beyond contemplation and into action. In September Pope Francis called us to Share the Journey with all displaced peoples; both refugees and migrants alike. CRS empowers us to do just that. By supporting the work of CRS; we the American Catholic Church not just reach across the globe to those in need but we truly share in their journey.

We will never know exactly whom we helped, what good it did or how their lives were improved; but God will and that will help us pass the biggest test of our lives.

DECEMBER 17, 2017

[IS 61:1-2A, 10-11](#)

The Third Sunday of Advent (International Migrants Day is Monday, December 18th)

Today Isaiah proclaims that "The spirit of the Lord is upon me...to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to captives and to release the prisoners." We as a Christian people, having the Holy Spirit within ourselves by virtue of our baptism quite literally also have the spirit of the Lord upon us. To whom must we make this same proclamation that Isaiah makes? We don't need to look very far in our troubled world. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world are indeed captives, held in the prison of inhumane conditions caused by war, persecution, grinding poverty, inadequate water and sanitation, meager educational opportunities, and natural disasters. Should it be that way?

Should the simple circumstance of the location of our birth determine whether we live a dignified life or one destined to be lived in misery? For many people

war, persecution and inhumane conditions form a prison from which there is often little chance of escape. When the opportunity to escape does come they accept the enormous risk and danger of being refugees in order to hope for a better life. For example, since the civil war began in Syria in 2011, over 5 million Syrians have fled their country and over 10,000 have died from drowning in the Aegean Sea or from other causes while making the journey.

We cannot and should be silent; Pope Francis is calling us to share their journey with our prayers and actions. Supporting Catholic Relief Services' work with refugees is one concrete way we can act. Every day, CRS welcomes those fleeing war and persecution, giving them temporary safe haven, food, necessary medical attention, and things as simple as water and encouragement; all while respecting their dignity as fellow humans. Part of our Christian vocation is to make the same proclamation that Isaiah and then to act on it. We must remember that belief without action is merely opinion. CRS provides the vehicle through which we the American Catholic Church can not only proclaim liberty to those held captive by war and persecution, but to make a tangible difference in their lives, and in doing so, ours as well.

JANUARY 7, 2018

[MT 2:1-12](#)

The Epiphany of the Lord, Start of National Migration Week

Have you ever considered what you would do if some of the people around you sought to take your life or the life of your child? How would you react if there were no police to go to, few friends to rely on and overwhelming forces coming after you? Would you stay and fight a hopeless battle, would you run for safety despite fear and risk, what would you do?

In today's Gospel, we hear the first hints of persecution of our Lord and the Holy Family. We hear that Herod makes a show of wanting the magi to learn the details of the birth of the Christ and share that information with him. If the story stopped there we might assume that Herod's intentions were indeed good, that he wanted to, "Do him homage." Later the story darkens, the magi are warned in a divinely inspired dream not to return to Herod and they "depart for their own country by another way." Herod's persecution does not stop there. We later learn in the next Gospel passage that Joseph too has a divine dream which tells him to, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Of course, the third scene in this sequence is completed when an infuriated Herod slaughters all of the innocent boys under the age of two around Bethlehem.

In a way this is astounding, the King of the Universe and Savior of the world becomes a refugee, fleeing from persecution and the threat of destruction. It

is a sad commentary on the human condition that like 2,000 years ago we still have refugees, people who flee their homeland due to war and persecution – only the numbers are much greater than in Jesus’ time. Today there are over 22.5 million people who are registered as refugees in our world and the average refugee spends over 17 years in a refugee camp.

One refugee is Ahmad Feres who fled Syria with his wife and three children in 2016. A devout Muslim, Ahmad holds two Masters degrees in engineering, taught at the University of Aleppo, is a civil engineer, and speaks four languages fluently. Despite his impressive résumé, in 2016 Ahmad and his family were running for their lives, with all of their possessions in a black trash bag. Ahmad and his wife, like Mary and Joseph feared that their children would be killed and would do anything, including moving to a foreign land to protect them. Ahmad left Syria with the resolve to protect his family, with the hope of returning someday, and also with the feeling that there was no one to help on their journey. What he found surprised him, Catholic Relief Services, the international humanitarian agency of the Catholic Church in the United States was there to provide his family and him with assistance, medical aid for his son and the dignity and respect due to any child of God. Which CRS worker that helped Ahmad and which American’s money went to helping his small family are of little significance; what is significant is that one refugee family was helped, one little boy received medical attention and a family was held intact in the darkest days that they could imagine. It just might be your support of CRS that made this possible for Ahmad and his family.


This coming week is National Migration Week. Pope Francis reminds us that it is not only our duty but in a deeper way the heart of our Christian vocation to reach out and “Share the Journey” with all migrants and refugees. We should see in each of their faces, the faces of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and aid them just as we would aid the Holy Family; because after all being made in the likeness and image of God, they too are holy.

FEBRUARY 4, 2018

[MK 1:29-39](#)

The Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today’s Gospel, we hear of Jesus’ ability to heal illnesses. In the opening verses, we learn that Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever. The simple act of Jesus touching her, “grasping her hand” brings about a miraculous cure. Then we hear that for the rest of the evening Jesus drives out demons and restores the health of all who are ill, one by one. We can only imagine the reaction of the “whole town” standing at his door. They must have been filled with wonder and amazement at the sight they beheld. Here was Jesus



healing and comfort to people who in the normal course of events would have likely been totally ostracized by the community. Due to their illnesses, they would have been considered sinners or unclean. Jesus defies this norm of Hebrew social life and in doing so, restores people to both health and community. It is an example that he set for us to follow.

As the body of Christ, we too must bring a restorative cure to those who are ostracized and live on the margins of human society. Among those pushed furthest to the margins are refugees and migrants. Unwelcome in their native lands due to war, persecution or economic hardship, many struggle to find safe haven anywhere because whole communities and nations consider them to be a threat to security, culture or economically. We like Jesus must defy the tendency of our own communities to turn from the migrant and refugee and extend a curative touch to them.

There are many ways to touch the desperate people at the margins of our own global society. In our local communities, we can offer support and time to organizations that strive to settle and integrate refugees and migrants into society. We can speak up to leaders and politicians; letting them know that in the finest traditions of our faith and national life we have consistently welcomed those fleeing hardship to our homeland. Importantly, we can also assist migrants and refugees on their journey by supporting Catholic Relief Services, the international humanitarian aid agency of the American Catholic Church. Through our support of CRS, we can literally “Share the Journey” of migrants and refugees by helping them with food, water, sanitation, encouragement, and direction. At the height of the refugee crisis in Europe from 2014-2016 when millions were fleeing civil war in Syria and persecution around the globe, CRS provided life-saving help to those in such great need. Their work, in our name continues to this day.

Jesus was not fearful of the ill people that he encountered or the norms that dominated his culture. He touched each one, restoring health, hope and a return to community. In our own time, we can do the same and in doing so bring wonder and amazement to the “whole town” that will come to our door to witness our faith and action.